

INTERCESSION

BY WILLIAM E. DOUGHTY

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Devotional

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DEVOTIONAL SERIES

INTERCESSION

THE MOST POWERFUL DYNAMIC *of* EFFICIENCY

By
WILLIAM E. DOUGHTY

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resources of the church.

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Intercession

The Most Powerful Dynamic of Efficiency

OF ALL the calls flung out across the world, the sovereign summons is to intercession. No other call carries with it the promise of fellowship with Christ so intimate, the probability of conflict so severe, the certainty of power to carry burdens and bear pain so large, the inspiration of possibilities of achievement so compelling. Upon no other human factor in world redemption, do so many and so weighty issues depend.

This is an appeal to use the great unused dynamic of the church. To him who prays, the Book brings new and gripping revelations; gold released for the kingdom goes on its way with vastly greater potency; and service becomes truly redemptive. Vital Christian experience, without which intercession is impossible, needs continuous Bible study, but Bible study without intercession loses much of its challenge to life. Prayerless giving will never evangelize the world, no matter how vast the sum of money contributed. As to service without prayer, a word spoken years ago by Robert E. Speer penetrates to the heart of the matter: "Communion without service is a dream; service without communion is ashes." Much, but not too much, has been said about the financial underwriting of the missionary task. The supreme

need and the final appeal is that the work be underwritten by prayer. The King, holding in his life all energies and all plans and all love, calls on us through intercession to release his energies, to discover and execute his plans, and to make his love known to mankind.

WHAT MEANETH THIS CALL?

THE Rev. Robert F. Horton says, "There are twelve parts to prayer: mediation, aspiration, adoration, recollection, thanksgiving, praise, contrition, confession, faith, supplication, petition and intercession." That so little is said in this chapter about the first eleven of these is not because they are not recognized nor because their value is unappreciated. All are indispensable to prayer, but intercession is the highest form of prayer and presupposes all the others.

A simpler classification, and sufficient for practical purposes, is that there are three kinds of prayer: communion, petition, and intercession. As S. D. Gordon says, "Communion and petition store the life with the power of God; intercession lets it out on behalf of others."

To some, prayer is a brooding, a dream, a reverie, and nothing more. Many limit prayer to communion with God. We agree with Tennyson that "Solitude is the mother country of the strong," but that is not all that real prayer implies. There is much about God that can never be learned or experienced except as men join him in the spiritual conflict with evil, which intercession implies.

Often it is said that submission, acquiescence, is the highest attitude of the soul. If submission is interpreted to mean obedience to the will of God, it is profoundly true. This must always be the position taken by a righteous man. All true prayer must of necessity revolve around the will of God. A genuine intercessor will always agree with the following thought:—

*“Not Thy gifts I seek, O Lord;
Not Thy gifts, but Thee.
What were all Thy boundless store
Without Thyself, what less or more?
Not Thy gifts, but Thee.”*

This is, however, far from all of the truth. Those who assert that submission is the highest attitude a soul can take toward God, often make a pious phrase a substitute for the moral and spiritual conflict which intercession includes, and without which no one can grow into virile manhood. If the biographies of all the men of achievement in prayer, whether in the Bible or in modern times, were fully written, vastly more would be said about importunity than about submission. The Rev. P. T. Forsyth well says on this point: “We say too often ‘Thy will be done,’ and too ready acceptance of this will, often means feebleness or sloth. Prayer is an act of will much more than of sentiment, and its triumph is more than acquiescence. *The popularity of much acquiescence in things as they are, is not because it is holier but because it is easier.*” Some have been disappointed in prayer because they have conceived it as a ready means of obtaining all sorts of per-

sonal blessings merely for the asking. Prayer is not a blank check which may be filled in for any amount on all occasions as the holder may wish. It is not a secret spring which any one may touch, and help himself to the treasures of God as he will. These are false conceptions and are not justified by the facts in the case, for prayer is not a mechanical and materialistic thing. It is concerned chiefly with spiritual forces and spiritual blessings. *What, then, is intercession?*

I

INTERCESSION IS THE PUTTING FORTH OF VITAL ENERGY

SERVICE, the giving of money, the going out of missionaries, represent the going forth of the life of the church. Intercession is no less a putting forth of its vital energy.

Let it be frankly admitted that there are mysteries in prayer which have not yet been satisfactorily explained, which have not yet been fully met, but, while this is granted, it cannot be denied that prayer has been, and ever will be, a great living reality among the working forces of Christian leadership. It is inconceivable that God should ask his children to continue steadfastly in prayer, to pray without ceasing, if there be no reality in prayer and if it be not a powerful method of working for the redemption of the world. The Bible often asserts, and everywhere assumes, that prayer has power to change things. Something really happens when men pray aright. In Christ's teaching, prayer involves the putting forth of vital energy in-

tended to secure definite and unmistakable results. Prayer is not passive, it is active. It is the kinetic energy of the soul applied to the highest tasks in the kingdom.

“SUPPLICATION WORKING”

THE EPISTLE of James was written by a very practical man, and of all the practical suggestions he makes, none is more compelling than the statement found in James 5:16: “The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.” Here is an expression full of vigor alluring to men of action. The thought seems to be that prayer puts forces at the disposal of God to be applied by him to definite tasks. Prayer does not change the will of God, but it enables God to change the wills of men. Prayer does not persuade God, but it gives God a power to bring to bear on men for persuading them. All prayer is directed to him, and the putting forth of prayer energy releases forces which God can and does use to accomplish definite and practical ends. Applying this thought to revivals, Nolan R. Best says: “Men planning for revival ask money and organization to bring their plans to pass. God asks only prayers. He can have a revival anywhere if he may have but enough prayers of the right kind to work with.”*

If prayer be a veritable dynamo of power, why is so little accomplished? Is not the answer the fiery word of the same James, “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2); or because selfishness makes the answer

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impossible, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures" (James 4:3)? The truth is that there is all too little of laborious toil in prayer. As the Rev. Andrew Murray reminds us: "If the amount of true wrestling with God in the daily life of the average Christian could be disclosed, the wonder might be, not that he accomplishes so little, but that God is willing to use him at all." When we go home at night from work for God too tired to pray, we have robbed God of that which he needed most to bring things to pass. The field of victory in prayer is trodden hard by the repeated charges of warriors who turn not back in the face of difficulty and danger.

"STRIVING IN PRAYER"

IN A few strokes Paul gives us a portrait of Epaphras, one of his powerful fellow workers (Colossians 1:7; 4:12, 13). The distinguishing work of Epaphras was his "striving . . . in his prayers" (v. 12). "He hath much labor" (v. 13). What was the object which led him to undertake the labor of intercession? The answer is that the Colossians might "stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God" (v. 12). What conflicts such a result presupposes! What Christlike love and no less Christlike warfare! What patient teaching, what stern reproof, what changed housing conditions in a heathen city, what revolutionized habits, what breaking loose from old relationships, what readjustment of life's plans! Yet here is a man who believes that intercession has

power to influence and change all these things. He proves his faith by spending his time and strength in prayer. Happy the church or city that has a modern Epaphras to set free the powers of the heavenly world by intercession for the redemption of men!

II

INTERCESSION THE DECISIVE HUMAN FACTOR IN SPIRITUAL CONFLICT

THAT we are engaged in an intense spiritual conflict needs no proof. That in the midst of the struggle for the spiritual control of the planet, God still wonders that there is no intercessor, is evidence of much lack of prayer on the part of the church.

“SALVATION THROUGH YOUR SUPPLICATION”

IN striving for the spiritual mastery of Rome and for victory in his imprisonment, Paul points out the two decisive factors (Philippians 1:19). The decisive divine factor is “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” The decisive human factor “is your supplication.” It is inconceivable that Paul should have depended so confidently on the prayers of believers did he not know that intercession had power.

How Two Battles Were Won

AFIERCE battle was at its crisis (Exodus 17:8-13). The odds were very great. Far-reaching issues hung on the way the battle went. Intercession was the pivot on which victory turned. Joshua was leading

the battle on the plain; Moses and Aaron and Hur, the intercessors, were in the thick of the battle on the hill alone with God. While intercession continued, victory was assured. When it ceased, the tide turned to defeat. Given a Joshua to lead the battle, a Moses and his helpers in intercession, and no Amalek can prevail. If in our day the church would realize the significance of that scene on the hill as the decisive factor in the conflict on the plain, the shout of victory would reverberate everywhere among the hosts of God. The battle goes against the church when intercession fails. The key to victory is some Moses, supported on either side by his brethren, entering into the life of intercession. Any spiritual or missionary movement will die out when this fire burns low, so that there are only smoldering embers where there should be the leaping flames. If only a sufficient number of workers in the kingdom would learn this lesson, Christ could perhaps pass over slow-moving, painful centuries in the history of the expansion of the faith, and swiftly deliver the kingdom up to his Father. "Write this for a memorial in a book" (Exodus 17:14) that intercession is the decisive human factor in the struggle for righteousness and redemption.

There is another intercession scene in the life of Moses even more moving than the one just mentioned (Exodus 32). This was a battle, not with a foreign foe like Amalek, but with sin in the lives of his brethren. Here is where the heart-strain is hardest, dealing with sin in those we love. While Moses was

on the mount receiving the law from God, Israel turned to idolatry. The very life of the nation was at stake. Stern measures were necessary, and again Moses turns to intercession and pleads with God for forgiveness for Israel (vs. 31, 32). "If Thou wilt forgive their sin—;" this seems so impossible without a supreme sacrifice that Moses breaks off suddenly and adds, "If not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." The thirty-third chapter of Exodus records the continuance of the intercession. God's tenderness with Moses, there mentioned, is eloquent testimony to the wonders wrought, and God's approval of Moses' prayers. Prayers that are nebulous and nerveless get no answer, but intercession that draws vitality from the soul works miracles in the spiritual world.

"BY NOTHING SAVE BY PRAYER"

Look at the desperate case of the epileptic boy (Mark 9:14-29). The disciples were defeated in their efforts to help him. They sought explanations. "How is it that we could not cast it out?" The answer is startling. Let us not try to obscure the meaning of Jesus by some mystical interpretation which has no practical relation to life. Hear Christ speak the word which explains much of the lack of power in the modern church: "*This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer.*"

Intercession was the decisive human factor in the conflict. If the faith of the churches in our day were only vigorous enough to ap-

propriate this word of Christ, what devils might be cast out of modern society! Christ here asserts the fact that there is only one human ministry of the church which releases enough spiritual energy to meet victoriously the great practical issues of the kingdom, and that ministry is intercession. If prayer has no virtue except its helpful reactions on the life of him who prays, if it change nothing, Jesus' words throw us back into hopeless unbelief. Such intercession as is here mentioned by our Lord is not simply a repetition of pious words. It is not intercession at all if it does not send the intercessor out with heart hot with indignation, and with inflexible purpose to fight evil until victory be assured. Once again let it be repeated that the decisive human factor is prayer.

III

INTERCESSION HAS GREAT ACHIEVING POWER

THE priceless human contribution to the kingdom is intercession. It is the highest creative function of human personality. Intercession is the only means by which an individual can touch a whole world. No man has money enough to set it at work everywhere. Service, even of the strongest and most gifted, is sadly limited and brief. A voice or a book, no matter how powerful, can reach only a few of the multitudes alive in our day. But prayer is a timeless force. It may be set at work any time, anywhere in the world, from any point at which the intercessor is located.

Any view of the work of evangelizing the world, which does not place reliance on intercession as the supreme method of conquest, parts company with much teaching of the New Testament, and all the best experience of the Christian centuries. Years ago the author wrote out a series of propositions regarding the achieving power of prayer. For a considerable period of years he has sought to test these propositions by the most thorough and scientific tests of which he knows. Such a process involves three things: taking into account all the facts, all the points of view, and all experience. After these years of testing no reason has yet emerged that has compelled the abandonment of a single one of the propositions. Rather it is true that faith in their reality is deeper than ever. What, then, can intercession do?

INTERCESSION BREAKS DOWN BARRIERS

THESE barriers may be personal, they may be obstacles involving a whole community or large section of mankind, even the whole world. These obstacles may be physical. They are much more likely to be mental or spiritual. There are wills to be removed, new mental condition to be created, or new spiritual energies to be released. Intercession is the greatest known solvent of difficulties.

There are some barriers which the human workers can remove. That these workers may have adequate courage and strength and skill will then be the burden of intercession for them. This opens a great field for prayer. There are many other obstacles which Go-

alone can remove by an exercise of his super-human power. Those who have made a thoughtful study of Christian history are amazed at the number of such obstacles which have yielded to intercession.

Many illustrations might be given. One will suffice. A meeting was in progress in a great university. The obstacles in the way of victory seemed insurmountable. In the face of these difficulties requiring the exercise of more than human power, a group of workers, instead of remaining in the meeting, assembled in a retired place and united in prayer that the obstacles might be removed. Before many hours the walls of a modern Jericho fell down. Battalions and batteries and battleships have no power to remove barriers like these. Intercession is mightier than them all. The very fact that the church faces almost overwhelming obstacles in our day is therefore a ringing call to intercession.

INTERCESSION OPENS DOORS

SOMETIMES these may be literal doors, as in the case of Peter (Acts 12:1-9). Verse five says that Peter was kept in prison, “*but* prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him.” It is no wonder that God found a way to get him out of prison. The deliverance of Adoniram Judson from Burmese prisons furnishes a no less remarkable illustration. When Samuel J. Mills and his associates began to pray for the way to open for the carrying of the gospel to all the world, the doors of three continents were closed. The Mohammedan world was like a great

door over which was written "No admittance." The Buddhist world, the Confucian world, the Latin world, were largely inaccessible. How were these doors opened? Men of faith acknowledged that prayer had more to do with opening them than any other human force whatever. When the church of Jesus Christ unites in intercession before the closed doors of the world, and is prepared to co-operate with God in meeting the needs behind these doors, the last one will swing on its hinges for the entrance of our victorious Lord.

INTERCESSION CALLS FORTH WORKERS TO ENTER OPEN DOORS

BEFORE lightly turning away from the awe-inspiring words of our Lord in Matthew 9:38, recall the fact that there is still a great untouched world, that millions still wait the message of redemption because workers have not been thrust out into the field. The great scarcity of workers in the home church and in the world harvest-field is known, often discussed, and sometimes mourned with deep sorrow, but not yet has the church undertaken seriously to fill the gaps in the thin line of battle by the one method which Jesus recommended.

The Student Volunteer Movement is an inspiring illustration of the power of prayer to thrust forth workers. In connection with the Kansas City Convention, in 1914, more money was spent to enlist prayer than was used to advertise the speakers. The number of volunteers who have gone to the field has

increased steadily from the beginning, and there has always been a recognition of the fact that, more fundamental to the life of the Movement than organizing campaigns to secure workers, is the multiplying of the number of intercessors.

Perhaps no Christian leader has arisen on the mission field in our day who has more completely abandoned himself to intercession than the Chinese evangelist, Ding Li Mei. He gives hours each day to definite prayer for individuals. More than a thousand names are on his intercession list. The Student Volunteer Movement of China is a concrete answer to his prayers. It is said that he has influenced more men to go into Christian service than have ever been secured by any other man during the history of the modern church in Asia. When the men of the church realize that intercession is the only possible means of raising up workers in the local church, for leading great reforms and evangelistic campaigns at home, and for manning the far-flung battle-line, a new day of power will dawn.

INTERCESSION RELEASES MONEY FOR THE SPREAD OF THE KINGDOM

It is a growing conviction that the financial problem involved in the evangelization of the world, is not fundamentally a financial problem at all, but rather a spiritual problem.

An emergency arose in a field in China. A gift of a thousand dollars was imperatively needed to meet the emergency. A cablegram was sent by the leader in China to the

mission board concerned, with the statement that prayer was being made that the money might be found at once and the need met. The cablegram was on the secretary's desk when he went to his office in the morning. He gave himself to prayer over the cablegram, that God might put it in the mind of some steward of His to give the money. He then went about his work with a quietness in his heart, expecting that the money would be found.

In the afternoon a plainly clad old man entered the office and asked for the secretary. His appearance at first made the clerk who received him suspicious, but after consultation with the secretary the man was admitted. He asked if there were any special emergency on any of the fields that some money would meet. For answer the cablegram was put in his hands. As he read it his eyes filled with tears. Controlling his emotion with difficulty, he said that he and his wife had been deeply moved while engaged in family prayers that morning, and the conviction had come that they ought to do something more generous for the Lord's work than hitherto. That conviction had led the man to call at the mission board office. Putting his hand into the outside pocket of a very much work-worn overcoat, he drew out a roll of bills and handed it to the secretary. With a great light of joy on his face, the old man quietly withdrew. When the bills were counted the sum was found to be exactly one thousand dollars. Intercession in China, more intercession behind a secretary's desk,

still more prayer in the quiet of the family, God putting thoughts into receptive minds, and generous impulses into loyal hearts—and a great need was met by releasing money before the day closed.

If the history of sacrificial gifts for the uplift of the world could be fully known, many another case like this would be discovered. It is also, alas, too true that many a crying need remains unmet because there is no intercessor. Such illustrations as that given above are a stumbling-block to some people because they say that there are many cases where earnest prayer was made, but the money did not come. Sometimes when there is an intercessor the other links in the chain are missing. There is no patent method of getting all the money one thinks he needs even for the work of the kingdom, for there are many elements involved. Kept within reasonable bounds, however, here is a secret of financing the kingdom, the possibilities of which have not been really put to the test as yet by the church.

INTERCESSION BRINGS VICTORY IN HOURS OF CRISIS

IF THE story of victory in crucial moments in Christian history could be written, what a volume of inspiring testimony to the power of intercession would be spread before the church! But what about the lost battles because intercessors were wanting or grew weary in the field, and so the end was defeat and death?

An illustration is given from the story of a layman who is conspicuously successful in

persuading churches to undertake large things in the support of missions. He was dealing with a difficult case. The official members of the church were narrow-visioned and selfish, and seemed unyielding. Two meetings were to be held. At the close of the first the case seemed hopeless. The official men were not willing to conduct the personal every-member canvass, or to challenge the church to adopt a worthy missionary program. The leader, a bit disheartened, went away to pray. During the interval between the two meetings he received a letter from a friend who reminded him that he was making intercession for him. This knowledge put new courage into the worker's heart, and inspired renewed and more earnest prayer. The second meeting opened, and it was evident that the whole atmosphere was changed. The official body voted for a policy that seemed impossible before. Who can doubt that prayer was the means of meeting the situation victoriously?

INTERCESSION MAKES POSSIBLE THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL WITH COMPELLING POWER

WHAT workers in the kingdom need, is so rich and full a measure of the presence of God as will make their lives compelling. Prayer contributes much of this quality to Christian service.

It is an oft-told story, but one which the church should never forget, of how Dwight L. Moody was led out into international service. While his church was in process of

construction after the Chicago fire, he went over to Great Britain to hear the leading preachers there, and to observe their methods of work. While in London he was invited to preach morning and evening in one of the large churches. The morning service dragged heavily, and he regretted having promised to speak at night, but found on his arrival in the evening that the church was crowded. The service began much as the morning service had closed, but about the middle of the sermon the atmosphere completely changed. At the close of the address, to the surprise of the speaker and the pastor, when an invitation to rise was given to those who wished to become Christians, scores responded. Thinking he had not been understood, Mr. Moody repeated the invitation, making it more difficult by asking that all, who wished to become Christians, to go to another room after the regular service was dismissed. The result was the same. A revival began which brought hundreds into the Christian life.

Mr. Moody afterward sought for the cause of this unusual awakening and traced it to the room of an invalid member of the church, a Christian worker who for years had prayed that Mr. Moody might preach in her church. On that particular Sunday, having heard after the morning service from her sister that Mr. Moody had spoken that morning, this Christian intercessor, refusing to eat her mid-day meal, gave herself to prayer during the entire afternoon. It was the final tug in the long pull of years of intercession. The answer came, not only in great blessings to

London, but, also, by lifting Mr. Moody into a position of international leadership, made possible widening spheres of influence and blessing throughout the world.

SHALL WE POSSESS THIS ACHIEVING POWER?

IF obstacles are to be broken through, if doors are to be opened, if workers are to be thrust out into unoccupied fields, if money is to be found to finance the enterprises of the kingdom, if victory is to come in hours of crisis, if the gospel is to be preached with compelling power, if conquering leaders are to be raised up, the men of the church must resolutely purpose to be men of prayer.

IV

INTERCESSION

IS THE CLIMAX OF THE EQUIPMENT OF THE SERVANT OF GOD

OLD TESTAMENT INTERCESSORS

SAMUEL is considered the file-leader of the Old Testament prophets. His character is strikingly illustrated in 1 Samuel 2:26: "And the child Samuel grew on, and increased in favor both with Jehovah, and also with men." Almost these very words are later spoken of Jesus. In 1 Samuel 12, there is preserved for us a noble address of this statesman-prophet, the Washington of his day. He is about to lay down certain state responsibilities because Saul has been chosen king. There is one function he does not propose to relinquish; whatever else is to go, this is to remain. That service to his people

is intercession. The possibility of failure in this ministry was the one sin which frightened him, so he says: "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you" (v. 23). Here was one of the impressive secrets of his pure and powerful life. Surely lack of prayer is a high crime against both church and state.

Abraham's intercessions are inspiring (Genesis 18); Elijah's chief element of power was his intercession, and it prevailed for Israel (1 Kings 17:22; 18:42-45; James 5:17-18). Hezekiah not only secured blessing for his people by prayer (II Chronicles 30:18-20), but turned back death for years in the same way (Isaiah 38:1-8). It was by this means that Sennacherib was defeated (Isaiah 37:14-37).

THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

THE ACTS is the first volume of missionary history, and is full of the story of answered prayer. It was in connection with ten days of prayer (Acts 1:4), when the church united its intercessions with those of Christ (John 14:16), that the Holy Spirit was released upon the disciples for world-wide witnessing. It was prayer that made the vision of the Christ Man and the Christ Message clear (Acts 6:4-10; 7:60). Prayer safeguarded the lives of the workers (Acts 4:24-31; 12:5; 16:25; 27:24). It was at a place of prayer that the first converts in Europe were made (Acts 16:13-15). Intercession thrust the apostolic missionaries forth on their evangelizing journeys (Acts 13:2-4). Prayer called forth the martyr spirit and gave the

workers resistless courage (Acts 4:31; 16-24). Intercession released great spiritual forces (Acts 10 and 11), influenced courses of action (Acts 3:1), prepared the field and subdued the enemies of Christ (Acts 16:25-29). All this and more, intercession will do for the modern church, if only with the same abandon and the same insight modern men go forth to their world-wide conquering tasks.

PAUL

PAUL, like every genuinely redeemed man, began his Christian life with prayer (Acts 9:11). The spark there kindled burned with increasing ardor all through his life. His Epistles are "inlaid with prayer." The Rev. Charles E. Jefferson says of him, "Paul is charged with heavenly electricity, and these letters are electric sparks struck from him by the friction of passing events." This heavenly charging by the Holy Spirit cannot be counted for apart from prayer. "Paul was a volcano in a perpetual state of activity," says another. Intercession stoked the subterranean fires. His letters begin and end with prayer; they are saturated with this spirit. His appeals that others pray for him would have been impossible, did he not believe that intercession was a power unmistakable and indispensable to the progress of the kingdom. When he says to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 1: 19-11): "God . . . will also still deliver us; ye also helping together on our behalf by your supplication," he believes that prayer has power. As a

summary of his convictions on this subject, ponder five sentences:—

“I exhort, therefore, *first of all*, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men” (I Timothy 2:1)—the *primacy* of prayer.

“In nothing be anxious; but *in everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6)—the *inclusiveness* of prayer.

“With all prayer and supplication, praying *at all seasons* in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18)—the *time* for prayer.

“I desire, therefore, that the men pray *in every place*, lifting up holy hands” (I Timothy 2:8)—the *place* for prayer.

“Pray *without ceasing*” (I Thessalonians 5:17)—the *continuity* of prayer.

Gather up the five pregnant phrases italicised in the quotations and you have a bit of Paul’s conception of how central a thing prayer is in the life of the Christian: “*First of all.*” “*in everything,*” “*at all seasons,*” “*in every place,*” “*without ceasing,*” “**PRAY!**”

The climax of Paul’s description of the equipment of the spiritual warrior in Ephesians 6:10-20 is prayer. The girdle, the breast-plate, the sandals, the shield, the helmet, the sword, intercession. These are his armor. The description does not end with verse 17, as we have too often thought. The

climax is in verses 18 and 19. "With all prayer and supplication, praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints, and on my behalf." This is the supreme method of attack. What is the result of such fighting? For answer read verse 13, as phrased in *The New Testament in Modern Speech*: "Therefore put on the complete armor of God, so that ye may be able to stand your ground on the day of battle, and having fought to the end, to remain victors on the field." We repeat verse 18, as given in *A New Translation of the New Testament*: "Praying at all times in the Spirit with all manner of prayer and entreaty—be alive to that, attend to it unceasingly, interceding on behalf of all the saints."

OUR LORD

How inseparable this theme is from the teachings of our Lord, is very strongly brought out in such books as Andrew Murray's *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, and it is earnestly urged that this book be read frequently and studied always with the open Bible in hand.

Christ constantly prayed (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; Matthew 14:23; Luke 9:18; 9:28, 29). The burden of his prayer is for others, as is so powerfully revealed in John 17, where Christ prayed for the oncoming centuries and the world-conquering church. That chapter is the cathedral of the New Testament. Christ considered prayer more important than public speech, as is shown by

the fact that his profoundest concern for his preachers was that they be men of prayer. His lessons were not so much on how to preach as on how to pray (Matthew 6:5-15; 17:19, 20; Luke 11:1-13; Luke 18:1-14). Teaching and healing were less urgent than prayer with our Lord, for when the multitudes were pressing him for healing and teaching he withdrew to pray (Luke 5:15, 16). Sleep and rest are gifts of God, but not so necessary as intercession, for they were both sacrificed when urgent needs arose (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). Christ states only one method of securing workers, and that method is intercession (Matthew 9:38).

Jesus teaches that it is on prayer that some of the promises wait their fulfilment. If this be untrue, why does Jesus say, "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you*" (Luke 11:9, 10)? Intercession is not simply a placid asking, or even an earnest seeking, but sometimes it must be a rising up in one's might to smite the closed door. God has promised the Holy Spirit to all (Acts 2:3,9) but in connection with the passage in Luke mentioned above, Jesus illustrates the necessity of asking, seeking, knocking, by saying, "*How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*" (Luke 11:13). It is not only true that the fulfilment of promises wait on prayer, but also in some circumstances it is upon prayer that the Holy Spirit waits to co-operate with men. Pentecost and all the repetitions of the experience in Acts are preceded and ac-

companied by prayer. This means that the kingdom delays its coming where there is lack of prayer. What a sense of responsibility and compulsion this should bring to every Christian! How universal is the unnecessary poverty and misery and wreckage which praying men might have prevented or removed!

But the fact which lays hold of one so powerfully that the very wonder of it becomes well-nigh overwhelming is the fact which is now about to be stated. Pray that the significance of the truth may lay hold of the very soul. *The crowning evidence of the place of intercession in the life and plans of Jesus is the fact that the Bible is silent about all the wonderful and holy activities of our Lord since the ascension except this one.* It is inconceivable that Jesus has suspended action in behalf of the church and his world. What has he been doing all these centuries? The central activity of Jesus has been the highest, hardest, costliest ministry. "*He ever liveth to make intercession*" (Hebrews 7:25; see also Romans 8:34). A prayer two thousand years long! It is as though God desired that no one should be confused by the mention in the New Testament of a large number of activities of the ascended and living Lord. He reveals only this single highest ministry of the Redeemer in heaven. What does this intercession do for the church and the world? The arresting startling answer is, "*Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost.*" The place which Jesus gives to intercession is this: when he was here on earth, redemption was finished

in intent by his death and resurrection, but that *redemption cannot be perfectly applied and made completely effective without intercession.* It is because intercession is made—his and ours—that he is able to save to the uttermost.

A BATTLE CALL

PRAAYER therefore is both an altar and an arena, a shrine and a battlefield. Prayer not only means blessings, but weapons of war. Sometimes intercession will employ the implements of the wrecking crew.

All this costs. It exhausts the stoutest soul. It is the manliest art. It brings the reactions of the most strenuous toil. It allures the athletic soul, and challenges the heroic spirit.

Shall we not then hear the call from Christ for prayer, more prayer, much prayer, and give to this the foremost place in the use of our time and strength?

A LIFE OF EVER DEEPENING POWER

IN A pamphlet by the Rev. Henry W. Frost, Home director for America of the China Inland Mission, entitled "Intercession," the author says that there are three stages through which the intercessor must pass.

First, there is the stage of *amplification.* Real intercession does not stop until it has taken in a world. No more vision-bringing, horizon-expanding practise is possible to a Christian than this. Mr. Frost relates the experience of the Rev. J. Hudson Taylor. "He said that he once made a discovery

which awakened and startled him. He had been interested in China, and he used to begin his praying for that land, and he would pray for it so long that he had little time to give to other countries. As a result, he determined that he would reverse the process of praying, beginning with the forgotten lands and ending with China. On thinking the matter over he discovered that South America was most frequently left out of his praying, and from that time on he generally began his prayer with South American lands."

The second stage is *specification*. Intercession not only leads one ever farther afield, it also inevitably compels more attention in details—to individuals and groups and special needs all over the world. To quote again from the pamphlet mentioned above: "Let me frankly say that you will do well to think twice before you set your face toward this sort of intercession. For this kind of praying will take time. It will mean the giving up of prized pleasures and privileges, earlier rising and often loss of sleep at night. It will mean pressing the battle to the gates, until you are laying hold of Satan's stronghold and wrestling with powers in heavenly places. Such praying becomes prolonged, and is necessarily intense."

Finally there is the stage of *identification*. "Intercession amplifies and specifies, but before it is finished, it puts the life so closely in contact with God on the one hand and man on the other, that oneness is obtained and maintained. And I assure you, if I know

anything about intercession, that this experience costs more than any other. I told you a moment ago to think twice before you set your face to a life of intercession. I would now say think thrice about it. For, if the other experience cost, this experience costs much more. I would urge you for the sake of the church, for the sake of the world, and above all for the sake of Christ to become an intercessor. Nevertheless, remember that doing this will mean, not only that you will have to rejoice with those who rejoice, but also to sorrow with those who sorrow. For identification implies that you will have to suffer with God in his compassion for a back-slidden church and an unsaved world, and that you will have to lay down your life as a sacrifice in behalf of all the sons of men. All this will mean much pain that will be nothing less than soul travail. As I speak, I am in my thought, far away in China, traveling on a house-boat. There are in the boat, besides the Chinese crew, the Rev. and Mrs. J. Hudson Taylor and I. It is night, and disturbed for some reason, I cannot sleep, but am lying awake in the darkness. In a little while I hear the striking of a match upon a box, and then I see through the thin curtain the flicker of a light. I know what it is. Mr. Taylor, the man who is not strong in his advancing years, and who ought to sleep rather than wake, is up and astir. Through the curtain I see him sitting, bending over the Word of God. Then presently I hear him pray. Through the hour or possibly two hours, I hear the pleading voice, the escaping

sigh. This man of God is interceding amply and specifically, but most of all is identifying himself with God and men, and this is the explanation of the choice of the midnight hour, the many words, and the sigh which almost amounts to a sob."

I CHOOSE——?

HERE then sounds out the highest, hardest, costliest call. It is the service which brings in richer returns than any other. Having faced the issue squarely, will you turn away unconvinced or unwilling to follow the clear call of God? Defeat, disaster, wreckage lie that way! Or will you now make this last and highest covenant to join with Jesus Christ in unfailing intercession that Satan's dominion may be ended, and Christ made victor over all the world? Eternal issues hang in the balance as you decide.

Jesus Christ looks into our eyes with a tenderness of appeal possible only to One who has lived an undamaged life. May every man who sees these words look steadily into the face of Christ and say: "I choose the intercessor's place of toil and victory, and pass out into the conflict, never to leave the battlefield until life is laid down, or until the crown is placed upon the brow of Christ, and this prodigal world is brought back to our heavenly Father's heart."